PALESTINE REFUGEE PROBLEM

Notes on the Settlement and Rehabilitation of Palestine Arab Refugees

The condition of the Palestine refugees and persons eligible for relief has considerably worsened in recent months.

Their numbers, though severely decimated by the rigours of the last winter, coupled with disease, malnutrition, and over-exposure, have been increased by the addition to their numbers of two hundred thousand, composed of farmers and townspeople from border areas that have been or are to be handed over to the Jews in accordance with the Armistice, as well as by unemployment of a large number who have spent all their savings and require relief assistance.

Agricultural settlement for the rural element and a system of absorption for the urban element are more keenly wanted now than any time before.

Refugees are drifting aimlessly. There is no organized effort at present for their relief save the temporary and inadequate food, clothing, and medical treatment given to a large number but not to all needy persons by the three organizations under United Nations auspices.

This attention and care has been far from perfect, and has been the cause of criticism in a number of places. The present relief measures are of an emergency nature and of temporary duration. This relief work should have been extended to include refugee settlement schemes as long as these temporary funds existed.

Through his personal efforts, the writer has obtained the approval of Saudi Arabia for the employment of a number of technicians, craftsmen and professionals from among the Palestine refugees in Egypt. These efforts are also being extended to other Middle East countries; but this will absorb only a small fraction of the urban and professional type of refugees.

An organized effort is required to investigate possibilities of absorption of the refugees in all Arab countries in the Middle East and in all walks of life. The plight of the Palestine Arabs is a golden opportunity for the Arab States to obtain assistance in building up their own countries.

Comments on each country follow:

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Tripolitania and Cyrenaica

These two provinces until 1940 depended entirely on Italian technicians, craftsmen, doctors, educators, and the like. Natives were generally discouraged, or did not avail themselves of higher and advanced education. The country could benefit by the employment in Civil Service and in private practice of dentists, doctors, pharmacists, teachers, telephone and telegraph operators, as well as businessmen, clerks and ex-government officials, etc.

Egypt

This country is thickly populated. The refugees in Egypt do not exceed 12,000, part of whom are in the refugee town of El Kantara. The remainder are living on their own, and have not received any form of relief assistance whatsoever. A voluntary committee is at present engaged in trying to procure relief measures and employment for as many of the needs as possible.

Special legislation has been enacted against the employment of refugees in any occupation while in Egypt. This legislation is to be found in no other Arab country.

The number of refugees in Egypt is very small and could easily be absorbed among the 20,000,000 Egyptians.

However, rural settlement would be difficult as there is land hunger among the Egyptian rural community and all government efforts are directed towards increasing the area of arable land, by reclamation, and water supply.

The Arab refugee element in Egypt is mainly urban or semi-rural and could well be engaged as laborers, artisans, craftsmen, professionals, clerks, shopkeepers, etc.

Lebanon

This small country has a comparatively dense population and its capacity to absorb refugees is limited. Agricultural projects might absorb a number of the refugees; however the bulk of these should be settled in a country where the agricultural potential is greater.

The refugees are permitted to engage only in trading and farming activities by the Lebanese authorities.

Severe restrictions exist against their employment by companies, banks or public institutions. Doctors, dentists and lawyers are not allowed to practice.

Syria

Both the Syrian people and Government have accorded the friendliest reception to the refugees. Social legislation has been enacted in order to give employment and employment preference to the refugees.

Doctors and lawyers have been allowed to practice. The Government has employed a few hundred school teachers and other technicians from among the refugees who were previously engaged by the Palestine Government.

The country is under-populated and shows great possibilities for development, both in agriculture as well as industry.

Vast areas of arable land await organized effort for development.

Iraq

This country has large areas which are underpopulated and consequently could absorb refugees in both towns and rural areas. The number of refugees at present is small. The Iraqi Government and population are favorably disposed to receive them.

The climate in central and southern Iraq is malarial and unfriendly. The soil is generally unfertile and much of it contains saline deposits due to lack of drainage.

Transjordan and Arab Palestine

These two territories complement each other. Both are poor and will remain so for some time to come. Water resources are limited and consequently irrigation possibilities are also limited. Agriculture on a very intensive basis and close settlement are necessary corollaries. The Government has exhausted its resources in trying to help refugees.

The Jordan Valley on both banks will have to depend on expensive pumped river water, in some cases from 2-4 miles and at an elevation of 300 to 400 feet before it can flow by gravitation to cover an appreciable surface. A certain amount of soil erosion will have to be undertaken in order to render the soil suitable for the production of crops. Area is malarial.

In the south of Transjordan, namely to the west of Maan, the shallow water table could provide irrigation water for small patches of land.

The climate is reported to be good -- but this area is far removed from civilization and communications are difficult.

Saudi Arabia

This country has vast undeveloped potential. Little can be done before this potential is properly explored. There are, however, areas known as Wadi Sirhan, Krayyat El Milh and El-Jauf across the borders from Syria and Transjordan. The oases in that area have abundant springs and wells which permit the sparse population to practice primitive agriculture. He was informed that the Saudi Arabian authorities would welcome a denser population in that border area.

The Yemen

The possibilities in this country where the climate is suitable at high elevation, should be explored so that every Arab country might share the burden of their plight.

The British and American oil companies, as well as other large contracting bodies (e.g. railway contractors in Saudi Arabia) can make a positive contribution to this problem by giving employment preference to refugees. Whenever housing accommodations can not be provided, bonuses might be given as compensation.

The settlement and rehabilitation of the refugees in agricultural or urban areas in the Arab States must be closely linked with financial compensation, for both the movable and immovable assets and property which were left behind, as well as for the suffering caused by displacement and homelessness.

Should funds under any scheme such as Aid to Backward Countries be extended to the Arab States for building up a bulwark of democracy -- thousands of these refugees might be given employment in Public Works, factories, and other occupations arising from the assistance granted.

Immediate Procedure

It is assumed that in the not distant future, funds will be made available for the resettlement of refugees.

It is of utmost importance at present to set up the necessary machinery and staff (1) to collect detailed information concerning the refugees and to record all data concerning each individual family and its ultimate wishes and preferences regarding settlement, alternative choice, number of members in family, age groups, health, profession, and all other pertinent facts.

(2) Study of the various areas proposed for resettlement, to determine:

a. Area to be allocated.

b. Absorptive capacity i.e. number of families, and estimate of area required for adequate livelihood.

c. Water supply for agriculture.

d. Health and sanitation.

e. Nature of housing to be constructed.

f. Other contributions and amenities by the local governments, i.e. roads, telephone, public security, etc.

g. Schooling for children as well as social and religious recreation.

The team of workers recruited for this work will have to be accorded special facilities for travel and access to refugees in all Arab countries.

These workers should be recruited mainly from among the Palestinian Arab refugees, many of whom have had past experience in social welfare, agricultural extension, labor problems, and cooperative societies. The Voluntary Relief Committee in Cairo has a long list of ex-Palestine Government officers with considerable experience and proper training and discipline for this type of work.

When this project is completed, lists will be drawn up of every class of refugees, urban and rural, showing their aptitudes and desires.

A supreme council might be appointed including British, American, Palestine, Arab, and U.N. representatives as well as representatives of the Arab Governments concerned. This council will act as a coordinator of the work in each of the countries participating, in each of which there would be a council for refugee placement and relief; credit facilities to be furnished small traders, doctors, dentists, etc.

The agricultural settlement should be operated on similar lines and with as little difference as possible except in so far as climate and agricultural practices might differ and dictate.

This uniformity will simplify the problem. Fortunately there have been a number of settlement schemes instituted in the Middle

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East during the last 30 years, viz:

1. The Italian settlements in Libya under the Ente Della colonizzazione della Libia and the Instituto Nazionale Fascista della Providenza Sociale (both institutions showed satisfactory results before that country was lost to the Allies)

2. In the Sudan, the Jezira Scheme, the Alternative Livelihood Scheme, and the Gash Board Scheme, are good examples of an underdeveloped country.

3. The Kibutz system in Israel is rather too bold and leftist - while the Jewish small holding settlements are essentially cooperative settlements; each family independently runs its own farm with a well developed cooperative system for its products and requirements. This group includes a group of independent farmers who operate as business entities, bound together by common safeguarding interests of a cooperative nature, and mutual insurance for livestock, plants, etc.

It should be carefully noted that any settlement scheme which does not have as its objective the permanent settlement of each farm family on land that will some day become its own will not be readily accepted. Security of property is vital. Of the settlement schemes mentioned above, the Italian schemes of Libya and the Jewish small holding settlements schemes of Palestine with certain adjustments would be the most welcome type to the average refugee farm family.

It is essential to get started before the advent of autumn as far as the agricultural work is concerned so that emergency housing (if necessary pre-fab houses), machinery, pumps, engines, seed, fertilizers, could be made available and the loss of another agricultural season be avoided.

Conclusions

1. A staff should be established in order to collect and record complete data concerning refugees.

2. Study of the capability and willingness of the Arab States to absorb Arab refugees; capacity in numbers as well as types of refugees

3. Exploration and study of areas for agricultural settlement in the Arab States, as well as other contributions and facilities to be provided by those countries.

4. Negotiation regarding absorption of non-agricultural refugees.

5. Preparation of all background and planning material necessary for the scheme, so as to facilitate immediate implementation as soon as conditions permit adoption of the scheme.

Jamal Hammad

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